

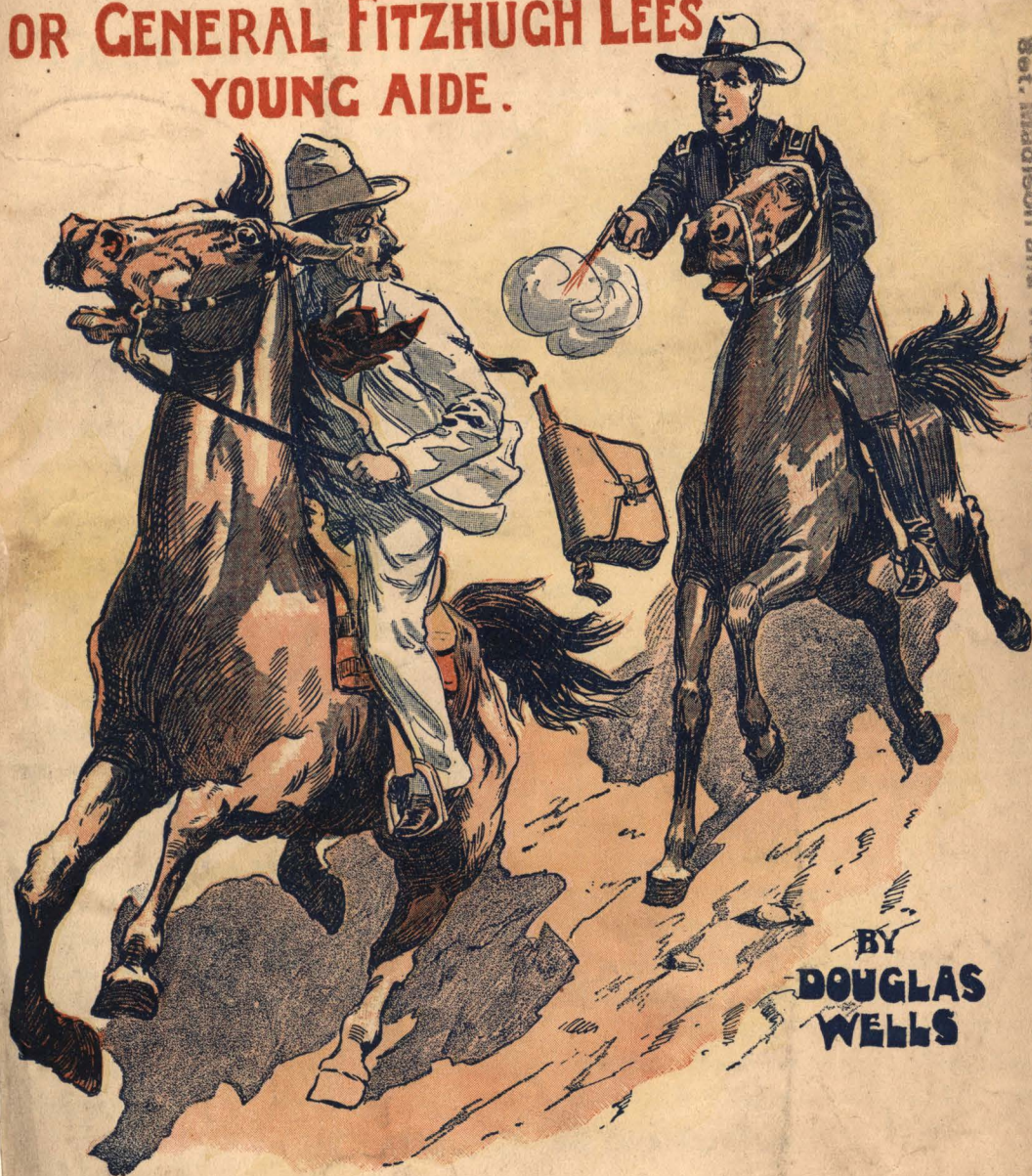
STARRY **FLAG** **WEEKLY**

THRILLING STORIES
...OF...
OUR VICTORIOUS ARMY

STREET & SMITH,
PUBLISHERS

LIEUTENANT HAL ON STAFF DUTY

OR GENERAL FITZHUGH LEE'S YOUNG AIDE.



BY
**DOUGLAS
WELLS**

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Starry Flag Weekly

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LIEUTENANT HAL ON STAFF DUTY;

OR,

General Fitzhugh Lee's Young Aide.

By DOUGLAS WELLS.

First Part.

CHAPTER I.

A FAMOUS AMERICAN.

"I—I beg your pardon."

"It is really not worth mention, sir."

A young man in civilian dress, bending low and looking into the eyes of the girl with whom he was promenading, had bumped into the youngest army officer in the army headquarters in the Tampa Bay Hotel, Tampa.

Recovering, with a flush of embarrassment, the civilian had turned to the officer and made his apology.

The young officer, who accompanied his acknowledgment by a bow that was the embodiment of soldierly grace, was Lieutenant Hal Maynard, who, when the war was but a few weeks old, had gained a fame that many of his ranking officers envied.

The event just recorded was a trifling one, over and forgotten, so far as the actors were concerned, in a few seconds.

Yet one man noticed the happening with interest.

That man was somewhat short, thick-set, florid-faced and kindly eyed; with a rather rounded head which a phrenologist would have explained as belonging to a man who would fight with dogged courage, yet who, at other times, was among the most amiable of men.

His eyes, while expressing kindness, showed also the keen penetration of an habitual observer. He was a man who would be a fast friend or a dangerous enemy, yet a man incapable of harboring enmity after the moment when the cause for it had ceased.

He was a man who was likely to be found where the affairs of men were most engrossing. Duty was his religion. Other men might falter in their trust, but he never!

He was attired in a neat fatigue uniform. On the brand new shoulder straps of his uniform glistened the two stars of a major general, lately placed there by commission of the President.

In a word, the man was he, who during the month of April, 1898, was the most talked about man in the United

BE PATRIOTIC—WEAR A BUTTON.

States—one of the country's most conspicuous of shining lights—a patriot, a soldier, and—a man!

General Fitzhugh Lee had but recently arrived at Tampa. He had been appointed to the command of an army corps.

As to the destination of his men, whether they were to go to Cuba or Porto Rico was not yet known.

General Lee preferred to go to Cuba. He was eager to meet General Blanco again, confident that at their next meeting the Spanish captain general would be a prisoner of war.

Yet, if the orders came to go to Porto Rico instead, General Lee was equally ready to go there. He was a soldier at all times, and a soldier cheerfully obeys orders.

It was his own possession of all the soldierly qualities that made General Lee appreciate the scene he had just witnessed.

"Good stuff in that young chap," soliloquized the general. "He turned just in time to be bumped into without expecting it. He showed no surprise or awkwardness—self-possession. His acknowledgment and bow displayed as much grace as any man in the army is capable of—just the sort of commander who handles men coolly and well. A West Pointer, that young man, and undoubtedly one who graduated well up in his class."

But in this latter opinion General Lee made a mistake. Hal Maynard was not a West Pointer, but one of the very best men who had come into the army from civil life.

Hal, on his part, had not seen the general yet, but he turned now just in time to see Lee looking his way.

Hal's hand traveled up to the rim of his sombrero in salute. The gesture was not hurried, nor tardy either.

"A good soldier," silently commented the hero of Havana as he acknowledged the salute.

Hal, who knew not how closely he had been observed, longed to take a better look at this famous American. He did not do so, however, since for a lieutenant to stare at a general would be a breach of army etiquette.

After saluting, therefore, Hal moved away.

It was early morning. There were few loiterers about the big hotel, many of the guests being yet in bed.

"I'd like something to do for a change," mused Hal, as he stepped out on the veranda, seated himself on a chair and tilted it against the wall.

Since his last great exploit of foiling the plot of the Spanish dons from Mexico to blow up the fleet of transports at Port Tampa, our hero had been without assignment to duty.

He had been wounded in the performance of that duty, and, though he was rapidly recovering, he was as yet by no means in the pink of condition.

His usually ruddy face was still pallid from the loss of blood. Though he walked with springy step, he had by no means fully recovered his strength.

Further, he was still on sick report, and that fact prevented him from being assigned to any active duty.

"When the doctors say the word I can get into harness again," mused the young lieutenant. "I hope it will be mighty soon, too."

While he sat there he was kept busy nodding to young officers passing in and out.

"Mr. Maynard, I believe?" half queried a young man who had sauntered toward him.

The questioner wore brown linen clothes with service leggings and an

SEE OUR NEW COUPON OFFER—LAST PAGE.

army sombrero. It was not easy to tell, at a glance, whether he was or was not in the army.

"Yes, my name is Maynard," answered Hal.

"I am McCorkle, correspondent for the New York Hustler," began the stranger, drawing a chair over close to Hal's. "Mr. Maynard, I'll be obliged if you'll tell me a little more than I already know about that affair the other day at Port Tampa."

"The affair?" repeated Hal, with a puzzled look.

"Yes; the occasion, you know, when you fished some Spaniards out of the canal. I haven't heard the whole story of that yet," went on the correspondent, persuasively.

Hal knew quite well to what McCorkle referred. It was the famous affair of the capture of the dons from Mexico. Quiet as the matter had been kept, however, the correspondents had heard something about it from some source, though not one of them had as yet got at the facts of the case.

But Hal knew quite well that he had no right to oblige the correspondent. Such news, if given out at all, must come through Colonel Westinghouse, who had charge of the army's secret service work.

"What was the story?" smiled Hal. "You correspondents have such facilities for hearing of things that it is refreshing for a poor officer to meet you. I shall be glad, by all means, if you have time, to hear what the story was."

"Now you are making fun of me," protested McCorkle.

"I assure you that I am not."

"Do you deny the story, lieutenant?"

"How can I, when I don't even know what it is?" queried Hal, placing one hand on the correspondent's shoulder.

"But I have it on the best authority

that you took a prominent part in the affair."

"That affair' again," laughed Hal. "You are making me curious, Mr. McCorkle. Are you going to tell me more, or are you going to keep me permanently on the anxious list?"

"See here, lieutenant," said the reporter, candidly, "all I know about it is this: It is said that you caught some Spaniards swimming in the canal, and that you fished them out. Do you mind telling me whether that was true?"

"If that is the story," fenced Maynard, "I don't dare tell you. Fishing in the canal is forbidden just now, so I would be getting myself into trouble by confessing any such thing."

"How many Spaniards were there in the batch?" asked McCorkle, quickly.

"Rather less than an army corps of them, I guess, from what the correspondents tells me."

Mr. McCorkle looked uncomfortable. This simple, green-looking young officer was not one who could be pumped easily.

"I'm afraid you're not talkative," grunted the correspondent, rising. "I'll get at the whole story, however, before the day is over."

"Oh, Mr. McCorkle," called Hal, insinuatingly, and the war correspondent, ten steps away, turned and came quickly back.

"I can give you a piece of news, if you won't tell where you got it."

"Of course I won't," promised McCorkle. "I never betray confidences."

"You promise?"

"On my honor."

"There was a big explosion over at Port Tampa this morning."

"The deuce you say!" ejaculated the Hustler man. "Any details?"

"Yes; the wind blew up the bay."

Mr. McCorkle looked highly crestfallen.

"I'll remember that," he promised, with a sickly grin. "But I'm going to return good for evil, and tell you some real news. A bulletin has just come in to the effect that the Emperor of China has set his entire fleet to Manila."

"What does that mean?" Hal wanted to know.

"They're after Dewey's wash. Good-morning, Mr. Maynard."

And McCorkle, looking somewhat relieved, walked away, but without the news he had hoped to get.

A moment later General Lee stepped out upon the veranda. He had overheard the reporter trying to pump the young officer, and had halted just out of sight.

Now, however, he shot a swift look at our hero, who, rising, stood by his chair until the general turned in the other direction.

"A good soldier," murmured Lee, once more. "He knows how to talk without telling anything—a valuable accomplishment in the army."

General Lee sauntered some distance down the piazza, while Hal, altogether ignorant that he had attracted even the passing notice of the hero of Havana, closed his eyes.

It was not long before the heat of the morning sun sent him into a half doze.

It was a piercing scream that brought Hal to his feet, wide awake.

He waited only long enough to understand that the shrieks came from a woman out on the lawn.

She stood close to where the train of cars pulling out for Port Tampa had just started.

The wheels were slowly moving, not yet having made a complete revolution.

"O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!" screamed the woman.

Hal, descending the steps at one flying leap, was now rushing toward her with the speed of a deer.

As he ran he saw what had happened.

Under the car, while the woman's back was turned, a baby had crept.

No one had seen the child until after the conductor, giving the signal to the engineer, had stepped aboard the train.

There crouched the child, too young to comprehend its awful peril, while the woman, paralyzed with terror, seemed incapable of rushing to its assistance.

Instead, she continued to scream with fright.

Only the conductor could stop the train in time, and he, looking at the frightened woman, failed to comprehend the coming tragedy.

But Hal saw and understood, his head seemingly coming up into his throat.

There was no time to shout to the conductor now.

Before the signal could be given over the bell cord the rear trucks of the car would grind out the little life.

Putting on a frenzied burst of speed the young lieutenant threw himself on the ground beside the track.

The next instant he was fairly under the car.

CHAPTER II.

LIKE AN AMERICAN SOLDIER.

There was a passing glimpse only of yellow-striped trousers leg close against the rear truck.

Two lives instead of one!

So it seemed, for the wheels rolled relentlessly on.

A baby's sharp cry added to the confusion.

Then the car was past, and Hal Maynard, covered with dust from head to foot, rose to his feet, unscathed, holding the sobbing child in his arms.

WAR BUTTONS FREE TO ALL READERS.

a Flop! The screaming woman gave a short gasp, then collapsed on the ground. Not more than a dozen people had witnessed the affair, most of them from a distance.

All who saw, however, now came rushing to the spot.

First to reach the scene was General Fitzhugh Lee.

He had heard the shrieks, had started at the same instant that our hero did, but, having further to go, had been distanced in the race.

Hal, still holding the child in his arms, hurried to where the woman lay.

In another second Fitzhugh Lee was upon the scene.

Off came his sombrero. His voice was husky with true emotion as he exclaimed:

"Lieutenant, I hail a hero! That was magnificently done!"

Hal, looking up, saw who had complimented him, and flushed with pleasure.

"It's all in line with army work, general," replied the boy, disengaging one hand to raise it to a salute.

"You are right, lieutenant, but I admire the modesty which makes you say so. I will say more to you, lieutenant, when this poor woman," turning to the fainting form on the grass, "has been attended to."

Among those who hastened to the spot were three or four women.

Much to Hal's relief, one of them immediately appropriated the baby, declaring that no man understood how to hold such a precious little thing.

The odor of smelling salts filled the air, and the fainting woman soon regained her senses, only to pass from one hysterical streak into another.

"Poor creature," cried several of the women, sympathetically, for, by this time there was a good-sized crowd on the scene.

Leaning on friendly arms, the young woman was aided into the hotel and up stairs.

"A negligent nurse, I'm afraid," commented General Lee.

"Not the child's mother, general?" queried Hal.

"No, indeed. Did you get no better look at the young woman than that, lieutenant? She wore cap and apron."

"I didn't really see her at all," confessed Hal. "She wasn't in any danger."

"Come with me, lieutenant," went on Lee, slipping his arm familiarly through that of the young officer, and drawing him aside.

So great had the crowd become, so many accounts of the rescue were in the air, that Hal was able to get away without being identified as the hero of the moment.

"Come up to my office," added Lee, briefly, as they crossed the portals of the hotel.

Hal followed in silence. Not until they were in the general's office, and the door closed, did Fitzhugh Lee speak again.

Then, turning and warmly clasping Maynard's hand, the hero of Havana cried:

"Lieutenant, I must thank you from the bottom of my heart for showing of what stuff the army is made. When I saw you throw yourself under the train my heart was in my mouth. I have seen men rush to certain death before, but your exploit affected me more deeply than any act of heroism I have ever seen. Your readiness I especially commend. If you had hesitated an instant to think, you would have failed. Your promptness, dash and intelligence are all thoroughly in line with the traditions of our army. You will do great things in the field, I hope, but you will never show more pure and simple heroism."

READ THE GREAT PREMIUM OFFER ON LAST PAGE.

General Lee spoke quietly, yet with a warmth and earnestness that made Hal flush more and more deeply.

"Thank you, general."

"You are under General Shafter?" queried Lee.

"Yes, general."

"And you are hoping, no doubt, to go to Cuba with him on the first expedition that sails?"

"That is my hope, general."

"But as to the present——"

"I am unattached."

"Would you care to serve under me, on special duty, for a while?"

"I would be proud to, general," answered Hal, and he meant it. "Especially," he added, "as I owe it all to you, general, that I am in the army at present."

"Owe it all to me?" repeated Fitzhugh Lee, looking puzzled. "Lieutenant, I don't remember that I ever saw you before this morning."

"That's just why I owe my army rank to you, general."

"Now, I am beginning to change my opinion of you," smiled Lee. "I thought you one of the most straightforward young men I had ever met, but now you are talking in conundrum. How could I help you if I never saw you before?"

"You remember the ninth of April, general?"

"I shall never forget it," answered Lee, his eyes flashing.

"It was then that you took out of Havana with you the last American who wanted to go—the last but one."

"And that one?"

"Myself, general."

"How could you have been left behind, lieutenant? I would have sworn, when I stood on the steamer's deck, while passing under the guns of Morro, that I had with me the last American in Havana."

"It was my own fault, sir. I reached Havana twenty minutes too late."

"What happened to you after that?"

"I had enemies there, and quickly found myself unpopular there. Jail was right next door to unpopularity, but I got out, thanks to the best friend that a man ever had."

"To whom do you refer?"

"To Captain Juan Ramirez, of General Gomez's staff. He is here in Tampa now, on business for the general. He and I escaped out of Havana in the night time, got hold of guns, and joined the Cubans. Each with the rank of lieutenant, we were sent to Key West with two Cuban pilots, who were to guide the fleet along the Cuban coast at the outbreak of the war."

"But your commission in the United States army? That is a prize not easily won."

"The commission was offered to me while I was waiting at Key West for a chance to get back to General Gomez. It was offered in order that I might be intrusted with dispatches from the Washington government to Gomez, dispatches to which I brought back that leader's reply."

"Now," quoth Lee, "I know all about you. I have heard all about that splendid achievement, though the name of the officer had slipped me. Mr. Maynard, I again clasp your hand and congratulate the service on having as a member of it such a young officer as yourself."

It was again Hal's turn to flush.

Ready at a moment's notice to go wherever duty called, and ready to do whatever that duty demanded, he wished afterward to have his exploits, if not forgotten, not mentioned.

The truest soldiers are always the most modest.

DO YOU WANT A FLAG BUTTON OR PIN?

"Will you take a seat and wait here, lieutenant?"

"Thank you, general," replied Hal, but remained standing while in the presence of a general officer.

"I am going to see General Shafter, and for two purposes. First of all, to tell him what you have done this morning, and to congratulate him on the possession of such a youngster. Second, to beg him to lend you to me for a little while during my stay in Tampa."

This remark made it appear as if General Lee did not expect long to remain at this army headquarters, but Hal asked no questions.

It is not customary for lieutenants to ask unnecessary questions of generals.

As Fitzhugh Lee went out, Hal sank into the chair.

He could not help looking about the room. It was one of the offices belonging to the general's suite.

On a desk nearby were piles and boxes of papers, probably all documents relating to the campaign about to be started.

It would be folly to say that young Maynard felt no curiosity concerning the papers, which would undoubtedly throw much light on the very questions which all the younger army officers in Tampa were concerning themselves.

Beyond a doubt these papers would throw much light upon such vexed questions as where the army was going to land in Cuba, what the strength of the forces would be, what regiments and batteries would be chosen, and a dozen other problems concerning which the young officers speculated but knew little.

Fitzhugh Lee's papers were safe, however, under the eyes of Lieutenant Maynard.

It is not too much to say that they would have been equally safe from the prying of any other army officer simi-

larly placed, for honor and shoulder straps are found together in Uncle Sam's small but magnificent force of regulars.

Outside in the corridors frequently heavy treads were heard. Plainly it was a busy morning at headquarters.

But nearly a half an hour elapsed before General Lee returned.

"Growing impatient, Maynard?" he queried, as he stepped inside and closed the door.

"No, general."

"Well, our little matter is arranged. When general orders come out this afternoon, it will be seen that you have been assigned temporarily to staff duty under me. But General Shafter, who has a big heart and thoughtful brain where his men are concerned, has exacted a promise of me relating to you. I have had to agree that, since you are not quite off the sick report, I will not give you any harder work than I can help."

"I am ready for whatever duty comes, general."

"Then take a seat at this desk, Maynard," directed the general, leading the way. "Your work to-day, if not as stirring as you have been use to, will be highly confidential."

So saying, Fitzhugh Lee inducted his new young aide to the very piles of papers which our hero had before noticed.

CHAPTER III.

WELLINGTON DEPEYSTER PRATT.

"Look these well over," requested the general, bringing forward one packet after another. "I want you to make yourself familiar with all these documents, since I am sure you know how to hold your tongue concerning their contents. At the same time, be careful not to disturb the order in which I have them at

"REMEMBER THE MAINE!"

WEAR A "MAINE" BUTTON.

present arranged. I shall be back here before long."

In another moment Hal was alone, with orders to peruse the very papers that he was most anxious to see.

His eyes opened as he proceeded rapidly with the reading.

One after another the government's most secret plans were made clear to him.

"What wouldn't Mr. Correspondent McCorkle give to have what he would call a 'satisfying talk' with me now?" grimaced the boy.

An hour passed.

Hal Maynard had gained a very intelligent idea of the contents of the papers by the time that Fitzhugh Lee returned.

"Mastered them, Maynard?"

"I believe so, general."

"Surprised a bit, aren't you?"

"Candidly, sir, I am."

"Not half as surprised, though," chuckled Lee, "as the Spaniards will be."

"I can quite believe that, general," smiled Hal, for the reading of those documents had shown the young lieutenant how utterly the dons would be astounded and discomfited by the real plans of the Government, so different from the plan of campaign as laid down in the columns of the newspapers.

"What do you think of the plans, lieutenant?" questioned Lee, sinking into a chair and biting off the end of a cigar.

His tone was one of such familiar friendliness that our hero was surprised.

"My opinion should be worth very little, general. But these papers have given me a great respect for the President and his advisers. From my way of looking at it, this campaign is certain to be conducted in a way that will simply crowd the Spaniards off the island of Cuba with the slightest possible loss of life to the Americans. It strikes me,

general, that the plan of campaign is more like a general and irresistible eviction than a fight."

"You have struck the key-note of the Washington scheme," nodded Lee. "Japan whipped China with a loss of some eight hundred men. It begins to look as if we were to triumph over the don with even more insignificant losses."

"Especially," smiled Hal, "unless the Spaniards take some real lessons in marksmanship before they face the American forces."

"You have about penetrated the situation," again nodded the hero of Havana. "And now let us get down to real business, lieutenant. These documents, or some of them, are too important for me to take the slightest risk of their falling into the hands of the enemy. These that I have pencilled with a blue cross I want condensed into fewer words, and then transcribed into the army cipher."

Hal rapidly sorted out of the papers that were so marked.

"Here is the army cipher book," went on the general. "You will understand, of course, lieutenant, that not even crown jewels should be guarded more jealously than this cipher, for if it fell into the hands of the enemy, few of our secrets would be safe from them."

For some time General Lee went to explain in low tones the intricate method of converting ordinary words into the mysteries of army cipher.

"Now, to your task, lieutenant," and Fitzhugh Lee rose and went toward connecting door.

"Judge for yourself, lieutenant, whether any callers for me will really need to see me. If you deem that they do, admit them. If not, send them away on some pretext or another.

Lee opened the door of his room,

A BUTTON OR BADGE FREE—SEE LAST PAGE.

fore he turned back once to add with a smile:

"The office on the other side of yours is occupied by Captain Proffitt, who enjoys the distinction of being the most profane man in the service. When he comes in you are likely to hear him swearing from time to time. Should the racket disturb you to such an extent that it interferes with your work, knock on the door, open it, and ask him to swear more softly. You will find the captain a perfect gentleman, said Lee, with another smile.

Left alone, Maynard buckled down to work with an industry acquired in the old days when he had clerked for a planter in Cuba.

Very quickly he found himself mastering the intricacies of the cipher code. The work proceeded rapidly.

Rap tap! came on the door.

"Come in," sang out Hal, throwing a spread-out newspaper over his work.

That which "came in" caused Hal a chill of apprehension.

He was a man of about forty, whose sallowness was almost blackness. His long hair, which came down below his shoulders, gave him at first, the appearance of a poet, but the clatter of his heavy club-feet on the floor dispelled that illusion.

He wore a frayed crash suit, topped by a felt hat to which he had evidently tried to impart a military angle.

In his left hand he carried a thick package of something, presumably papers.

His right hand came up to a clumsy attempt at a military salute as soon as he caught sight of Hal's uniform.

He opened his mouth. From the heavy make-up of the man Maynard almost expected to hear a voice of thunder. Instead, the tone which came forth was shrill and quavering.

Despite his vocal short-comings, however, the caller endeavored to impart an air of dignity to his words and bearing.

"I wish to see General Lee at once," was his first declaration.

"The general is very busy, sir," replied Hal.

"My business is pressing, young man."

"If you will tell me your name——"

"Wellington DePeyster Pratt."

"And your business?"

Mr. Pratt drew himself up with indescribable dignity.

"That, young man, is a matter that concerns only General Lee."

"But I am required to know the business as well as the name of every caller that comes to the general."

"Just tell the general that I will explain, my business to him in person," came the stiff retort.

"I am sorry, sir, but I am afraid that, at the rate we are now proceeding, you won't be able to get to the general today."

"This is outrageous," piped Wellington DePeyster Pratt. "Am I, one of the greatest living strategists, to be denied admittance to a general who would welcome me with open arms?"

"Then you wish to see the general on some matter of strategy, eh?"

"You have forced me to reveal my errand."

"It is too bad that you have come on the wrong day," answered Hal, in a tone of commiseration.

"You don't mean to tell me that the general has set a day on which he considers matters of strategy?"

"Not yet," replied the young scapegrace. "At present General Lee isn't considering strategy at all. As soon as he fixes on a regular day for that purpose the fact will be posted on the bulletin board down in the office. Until then

there will be no chance whatever for you to see General Lee."

"I was not treated this way by General Shafter," complained the thin-voiced man. "He will see me, will hear my plans, and is sure to be greatly benefitted by them."

"Then you have gained your purpose," Hal assured him, "since General Shafter is the one who will undoubtedly command the first expedition to Cuba."

"But my system of strategy does not look to an attack upon Cuba," protested Wellington DePeyster Pratt, seating himself in a chair without waiting for an invitation. "Now, see here, young man, the plan is all wrong. The Government intends to drive the Spaniards out of Cuba. At the same time the American authorities intend to invade Porto Rico, because Porto Rico is a good station from which to intercept Spanish vessels or supplies sent to Cuba. My plan, and I have lain awake for three nights to prepare it, is much simpler, fifty times more effective."

"Why drive the Spaniards out of Cuba? Why seize Porto Rico? Invade Spain itself, young man——"

"I haven't time to to-day," interposed Hal, but the specialist in strategy was not to be put off with any such trivial excuse.

"Invade Spain, young man. Seize the enemy's country and hold it as long as need be. When money and supplies stop coming from Spain, the Spaniards will leave Cuba quickly enough. When nothing can be sent from Spain, for the reason that the Government holds the enemy's country, then Porto Rico will prove to be worthless for the reason that there won't be anything there to intercept."

"Not a bad idea," assented Hal.

"I have here," resumed the strategist, "the most elaborately perfected plan for

capturing Spain. In an hour, I think, I can explain it to you perfectly."

Hal groaned inwardly. He did not like to be openly rude to this crank, who, after all, was harmless enough, and who had done nothing to invite rudeness.

"I am sorry that I haven't time to listen to your plans," began the young lieutenant, apologetically. "The fact is, I have a vast amount of work to do."

"Then, if you will show me the way to General Lee's own office, I shall be much better pleased."

"The general simply can't see any of for the present," Hal assured him. "But you have been very courteous, Mr. Pratt. Now, let me, in return give you a practical suggestion. Take your scheme strategy to the newspapers."

"The newspapers?" snorted the visitor impatiently. "Bah! Wellington DePeyster Pratt holds in very light esteem the gutter gazettes of this country."

"And quite properly, too," nodded Hal. "But not all of our newspapers are gutter gazettes. Let me tell you, a matter of confidential information, that the Government is at present taking its ideas of strategy from the helpful suggestions in the newspapers. So you see, my dear sir, that, in order to see your plan really considered by the Government, you will be obliged, first of to get it printed in one of our newspapers."

Wellington DePeyster Pratt looked dubious, but, after staring for twenty seconds at Hal's innocent, earnest face, he hesitatingly admitted:

"Perhaps you are right, young man. Yet it is so long since I have read a newspaper that perhaps you can advise me which one to take it to."

"The very one!" cried Hal, his face lighting up as if he had struck an inspiration. "But I must ask your word of honor

SHOW YOUR COLORS—GET ONE OF OUR FREE BADGES.

"I will not reveal me as the suggestor."

"I will not, young man, I will not," declared Mr. Pratt, in what was intended to be his most solemn tone.

"The New York Hustler is the very best, sir. Fortunately its brightest correspondent, Mr. McCorkle, is stopping in this very house. He will telegraph your full plan to his paper to-night, though I'm afraid that it will be necessary to find whatever maps you have through the slower channels of the mails."

"I am going in search of him now," proclaimed the specialist in strategy.

"I must warn you of a certain peculiarity of Mr. McCorkle's."

"What is that?"

"He is a pessimist—in fact, the fellow who devised the expression, 'what's the good of anything? Nothing!'"

"Not an enthusiast, eh?" questioned the Pratt, slowly folding up his package

"Not at first. If you want McCorkle to come over your plan, you'll have to coax him in spite of all his discouragements. Don't let him escape you, even if he pretends that he wants to. Hammer him until you make him, reluctant though he may be, as great an enthusiast in your plan as you are yourself."

"And you really believe, young man, that the Government will accept my plan attacking Spain, if it is printed in a local paper?"

"If McCorkle prints it in the Hustler, I'm ready to swear that the Government will see the scheme," was Hal's ready answer.

"Then here goes for McCorkle," piped Gordon DePeyster Pratt, rising and turning his feet toward the door.

"I'm sorry for McCorkle," grinned the caller as the door closed. "But McCorkle

had no business to sell me on that Chinese fleet gag."

CHAPTER IV.

MISPLACED KISSES.

There was undisturbed quiet for ten minutes.

Hal, working industriously, felt that he was making splendid headway.

Then the door opened. There wasn't any preliminary tap, or anything like it.

The very idea of preparation didn't seem to accord with the new visitor.

She would never see forty again, this caller, and it didn't need a detective to guess that she was an old maid.

She was more, in fact, for a second glance showed that she was undeniably "strong-minded."

Her tread, as she approached the desk, was vigorously mannish. Her clothes, plainly severe, had a more masculine than feminine cut to them.

"Where is he?" she demanded, severely.

"Lost your husband, madam?" inquired Hal, with an innocent stare.

"Husband?" sniffed the visitor. "Young man, do I look like a woman who would have a husband?"

"No, you don't," Hal admitted to himself, though he was much too clever to say it aloud.

"The person I want to see, young man," insisted the caller, "is your employer."

"Then I'm sorry, madam," rejoined Hal, in his most amiable tone, "but you can't. Uncle Sam isn't in Tampa. He lives at Wash——"

But his visitor, throwing her arms akimbo, spoke very slowly and distinctly:

"Young man, I—want—to—see—General—Lee."

"Name and business, please, madam?"

CUBA LIBRE—GET A CUBAN BUTTON.

asked Hal, dropping into his business tone.

"My name doesn't matter," asserted the caller. "As to my business—well, that will interest General Lee more than it will you."

"But I am required, madam, to know the business of all callers for General Lee. You will understand that it is an army regulation. I don't make the rule myself."

"I—I—I——" stammered she, and now astonished Hal by blushing furiously.

"Hal looked at her inquiringly.

"I am from Boston," she went on, with a little gasp. "I am the president of the Society for the Advancement of the Female Intellect. In view of my holding that lofty position, I fear you will be astonished at the nature of my business here. There are some members in the society who are altogether too feminine. It was they who prevailed upon me, in a moment of weakness, to come to the hotel during my stay in Tampa and see General Lee. But, more than that, I agreed—in the name of the society, you understand—to throw my arms around General Lee and kiss him three times, in recognition of the splendid way he protected American women while in Havana. And now," announced the angular visitor, rising with an air of heroic resolve, "I am ready to meet the general and kiss him!"

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" inwardly uttered dismayed Hal.

She was not a woman with whom obstacles would count, and the young lieutenant felt all the need of diplomacy.

"Madam, the general would be delighted, but—but, unfortunately, he is not in just now."

"Young man," came the severe reply, "I'm very much afraid you haven't made a proper estimate of my disposition. I am not to be put off so easily when I have

a serious duty to perform. While I regret extremely to throw any discredit upon your word, I am resolved to see for myself whether the general is in his office."

Rising, she walked with determined sweep toward General Lee's door.

But Hal sprang before her.

"Madam," he protested gently, "you are making a mistake."

"I know my business, young man."

"Doubtless you do, madam, but you are headed for the door of the general's negro valet."

"A negro?" shuddered the Bostonienne.

"A big fellow, and as black as coal, with a weakness for flirting with pretty women."

"The odious wretch!" shuddered the visitor.

"Follow me, madam, and permit me to show you General Lee's office."

Reaching the door opposite, Hal tapped on the door.

There was no response, for Captain Proffitt, as our hero had supposed, was out.

Thereupon, our hero threw open the door.

"You see, madam, there is General Lee's desk, but he is not in."

"Then where is he, young man?"

"That I do not know."

"Do not attempt to deceive me!"

"And if I did know, madam, it would be against the military regulations for me to tell."

"How soon will the general return?" demanded the persistent visitor.

"Possibly in an hour or two. I cannot say."

"Then, young man, you may look for me again."

Bang! The door slammed loudly as the guest departed.

Something like a sigh of dejection es-

caped the young lieutenant as he dropped back into his seat, uncovered his work and went at it again.

Within the next hour there were seven more visitors. One was a newspaper correspondent who succeeded in getting in to see General Lee, but the other six were cranks, all of whom our hero, with somewhat decreased patience, but still with courtesy, disposed of as quickly as could be.

In spite of these interruptions, Maynard's work went on rather swimmingly.

Finally some one else tried the door without the formality of knocking.

As it happened, the door-knob stuck.

"—— — — — that blanketty-dashed knob!" growled a deep-chested voice.

Then the door swung open.

"—— — — — measly hotel, to have —— — door-knobs like that!" grumbled the man who entered.

"Now, that can't be anybody but Captain Proffitt," thought Hal, before he had time to turn around.

It certainly was a captain, and a captain of cavalry at that, who entered.

He looked rather curiously at Hal as the latter rose and saluted.

"Haven't seen you before," greeted the captain, with ready cordiality.

"Lieutenant Maynard, sir; and you are Captain Proffitt, I believe."

"You've guessed —— — —— near right," was the hearty answer. "And I'm glad to run across you, Maynard. You've certainly got one of the —— — —— — finest records of any youngster in the my. I've heard a —— — —— lot about you, and —— — ——, sir, I'm —— —— proud, Maynard, that we're getting such a —— —— — lot of youngsters into the service nowadays."

This was said honestly, and the cap-

tain's hand-clasp was at least as warm as his language.

In spite of Proffitt's shocking profanity, Hal could not help feeling that he was gazing upon an honest man, a soldier who could do his duty, and do it without being envious.

"You've never seen me before, Maynard," went on the captain, "and I reckon you're —— —— — surprised to hear a man use so many cusswords to each breath. I've tried —— —— —— hard to break myself of it, but I can't seem to. That's one reason why I happen to be on staff duty. There's a —— — —— — regulation in the army that forbids an officer to swear before his men. Actually, Maynard, they court-martialed one good fellow out of the army for talking before his men like a —— —— pirate. Don't mind my —— —— language, my boy, and, —— it, we'll get along together first rate."

Saying which, with another cordial clasp of the hand, Captain Proffitt strode to the connecting door, and went into his room, whence there soon came the sound of a desk being opened.

"—— —— — hot day to expect a Christian to work," Hal heard the captain grumble, and then all was still.

"General Lee was right when he called Proffitt the most profane man in the service," mused Hal. "If he isn't, I would be afraid to meet the fellow who could carry away the palm from him."

Then for fifteen minutes Hal's pen glided smoothly over his paper, until the door opened with such a jerk that Hal muttered inwardly:

"The lady from Boston!"

He was right. The fair president of the society for something or other came into the room with the firm, resolute tread of a grenadier.

"Good-morning," she said coldly, and

YOU SHOULD HAVE A "DEWEY" MEDAL.

swept by Hal's desk, before the lieutenant could interfere, with the speed of a cruiser in chase of a prize.

She reached the left-hand connecting door before our hero, quick-witted as he was, could divine her purpose.

"Hold on, madam," he expostulated. "If you please——"

"I am doing just what I please," came back the icy answer, as the caller yanked the door open and charged into the next room.

It was too late to prevent the catastrophe. Hal sank back in his seat with a gasp, just in time to hear a shrill voice exclaim:

"Oh, you dear General Lee! I shall do it—yes, I shall! I promised to, and I never default a promise!"

Then the wind blew the door shut.

Immediately after there came a rapping on Hal's corridor door, followed by its opening, and a stout, comely woman of forty entered.

She smiled as our hero turned his head and then rose.

"I am Mrs. Proffitt," she announced. "I am going in to see my husband. He does not expect me."

Full of delightful anticipation of the surprise, Mrs. Proffitt made across the room with a speed that would hardly have been looked for in one of her proportions.

She reached the connecting door, in fact, before Hal could interpose a word.

On the threshold she screamed. It wasn't many seconds before there was another scream in a different voice.

While Hal collapsed into his chair, murmuring weakly:

"Oh, Lord!"

Second Part.

CHAPTER V.

A BOX OF CIGARS.

"You hussy!" screamed Mrs. Proffitt.

"Madam, how dare you?" demanded the shrill voice. "I am——"

"A hussy! A jade! A woman without any sense of——"

"You shall answer——"

"I'm ready to, I assure you! And so shall you, you——"

"It didn't seem likely that the discussion would end before both ladies got out of breath.

"Now, it's a dispensation of providence," reflected Hal, "that Mrs. Proffitt doesn't know how to swear in the same artistic way as her husband does."

"Now, ladies," broke in the captain, rather irritably, "would it not be well for you both to wait until I have had a chance to ask some questions, too?"

"It seems to me," retorted Mrs. Proffitt, with dignity, "that you can best confine yourself, captain, to answering them. I will do the asking."

"Captain?" repeated the lady from Boston, in a voice of bewilderment.

"Certainly," retorted Mrs. Proffitt, tartly. "You didn't think this great, red-faced booby of a masher was a captain, did you?"

"I have been deceived," retorted the society president from Boston. "The young man in the next room told me this man was General Lee."

"I wish I were," growled Captain Proffitt.

Whang! slammed the door between the two rooms, as it struck the mop-board guard.

Through the room steamed the indignant Bostonienne, not even deigning to glance in the direction of Lieutenant Maynard.

RALLY ROUND THE FLAG—WEAR A FLAG PIN.

"As for you captain," declaimed Mrs. Proffitt as she prepared to follow, "you can write me after a few days at my mother's."

And out sailed the offended wife, at a speed hardly less than that of the first victim of delusion.

Thud! Breathing like a winded race-horse, the captain fell into his chair.

Hal was on the point of rising, to go in and speak to his ranking officer, when the captain took the initiative.

"Maynard, — — — — you," roared Proffitt, "what does this — — — scene mean, — — — you?"

"It was a slight mistake that I couldn't foresee, captain," answered the boy, honestly.

"— — — — you, did you tell that woman with the frozen face that I was General Lee?"

"Let me explain, captain——"

"That's just what I'm ordering you to do, — — — — you!" roared Proffitt.

"It happened this way——"

"See here, Maynard, give me a — — — — answer. Did you tell that shrivelled-up Providence River oyster that I was General Lee? Yes or no!"

"Yes, but indirectly. I——"

"A nice mess you've made of it," roared Proffitt. "Fortunately you are an army officer, and obliged to stand up to your reputation as a gentleman. I'm going down to the bar now. When I've cooled off sufficiently, I'll decide which brother officer to send to you. Depend upon it, Maynard, that I won't pass by such a — — — — — insult without fighting!"

With which assurance the captain stumped out the same way the two women had gone.

"This is nice," murmured Hal. "If t's a fair sample of staff duty, I'd rather

be in the field making hopeless fights against an enemy."

Not very much disturbed, however, by Captain Proffitt's threat of a duel, he fell to work again with an industry that he hoped would make up for so many interruptions.

Monotonously the clock on the mantel-piece ticked out twenty minutes.

A firm, steady tread sounded in the corridor.

It was a soldier who was approaching. Hal knew that much by the cadence of the step.

"Proffitt's second, I suppose," reflected the boy.

But it wasn't. It was the captain himself, who, with a breath that was somewhat pronounced, crossed the room and dropped into the chair nearest our hero's desk.

"Maynard, began the captain, "I don't know but I may have been — — — — — unjust to you. Don't think me a — — — — — bully. If you've done any — — — — — thing that calls for my wrath, count upon my getting — — — — — ugly, all right. But it has struck me that I'd better hear your story before proceeding any further. Now tell me, my boy, just what part you had in sending that herring faced female in to hug and kiss me in such a — — — — — fashion. Tell me the whole — — — — — truth. I won't say a — — — — — word until you've finished."

Captain Proffitt kept his word. He listened soberly, at first to our hero's account.

Gradually, though, his face broadened into a grin. Hal's concluding words were drowned out in a loud guffaw.

"— — — — — it, boy, you did just right. Anything to save the general from such — — — — — harrowing disasters.

Never mind me. I reckon I'll survive it."

"But Mrs. Proffitt," suggested Hal.

"Oh, she's down in the parlor, fanning herself as if her arm ran by steam. She'll be all right, the dear old girl, for she can't hold a bad opinion of me long. In twenty minutes more she'll be ready to roar with me over the whole occurrence."

A conclusion of which the captain must have been reasonably sure, for, after shaking hands with the young lieutenant, he returned to his desk.

In fact, the captain couldn't have been worrying at all about Mrs. Proffitt, for Hal presently noticed that another half hour had gone by.

"I'll have this work nearly done by lunch-time," thought the boy. "I don't believe, from the way the general spoke, he expected it before night."

Then another fifteen minutes passed, with only one interruption, this coming from a crank who had a scheme for applying his alleged air-ship to war purposes.

But this fellow Hal got rid of with a facility gained during his morning's experiences.

Rap-tap.

"Another!" sighed Hal. "Come in."

He turned as soon as the door opened. The visitor proved to be a rather undersized man, but what attracted the young aide's attention was that the caller's face was bandaged so that only the eyes and forehead were visible.

"Good-morning," came the caller's greeting.

"Good-morning, sir."

"You are one of General Lee's aides?"

"Yes, sir."

"I do not want to take up much of your time. I can say all I need to inside of a minute."

"Take a seat, sir," requested Hal,

courteously, though he longed to be alone with his work.

"I am a great admirer of the general," began the visitor. "I owe him a debt of gratitude. We are Cubans, but the general brought my mother and sister safely out of Havana. For that I shall be ever grateful to him."

"You are a Cuban, then?" asked Hal, studying the other attentively.

"Yes, sir," came the answer, proudly. "I have fought under Giberga and Acosta, I was captured not so very long ago. Those Spanish devils vented all their wickedness on me. You see the condition of my face—or, rather, you do not see it, for the bandages. The fiends who serve Blanco poured boiling water on my face; they tortured me in the hope that I would betray some of my comrades and officers, but they failed!

"So they sent me back to a prison cell where I nearly died of the heat. On the next day they would doubtlessly have tortured me again, but I contrived to escape. When I returned to the field, my officers told me I must rest and gain strength before I fought again. I pray every day that my strength may come quickly.

"But I am keeping you, sir, with the recital of my own troubles. I will come to the point. A chance was found for me to come to Florida. Here I shall stay until the Cubans now here go to their own country. Before leaving Cuba my comrades gathered together the finest cigars they could get. There were just enough to fill this box."

And the Cuban brought into view a small box neatly wrapped in paper.

"No better tobacco was ever grown in Cuba than these cigars contain," he declared, proudly. "My comrades and I are a unit in desiring that every cigar in the box shall be smoked by General Lee."

YOU SHOULD GET A WAR BADGE AT ONCE.

Will you take them into him now, sir, with the compliments of a score of poor Cuban soldiers, including myself?"

"Certainly," assented Hal, taking the box. "General Lee enjoys a good cigar, I am told, as much as any man living. He will be delighted. Had you not better wait a minute? He will doubtless wish to thank in person a friend who pays him so handsome a compliment as the act of yourself and your friends amounts to."

"Why should I bother him?" questioned the Cuban, shrugging his shoulders as he arose. "I am only a poor Cuban soldier—he one of the greatest men alive. I should feel that I had wronged him by wasting his time. But you may be sure I pray that he will enjoy this box."

Saying which the caller turned and walked quickly out.

No sooner had the corridor door closed than another opened.

General Fitzhugh Lee entered.

"I heard all that the poor fellow said, Mr. Maynard. Since the prospect of meeting me really seemed to worry him, I waited at the door until I heard him go. But I certainly appreciated this compliment from Cuba. I am going out now, Lieutenant. If you see the good fellow again, kindly assure him that I am greatly indebted to him. Now, will you please place the cigars on my desk? But hold on; I believe I'll try one of the cigars right now."

Unwrapping the paper from around the box, Maynard handed the latter to his chief.

"You'd better try one of the cigars, too, Maynard," hinted Lee.

"I don't smoke, sir, thank you."

Fitzhugh attempted to pry up the lid of the box.

Just then a horrified yell came from the young aide.

Before Fitzhugh Lee realized what had

happened, Lieutenant Hal sprang forward, snatching the box out of the general's hands.

CHAPTER VI.

"HALT, OR I'LL FIRE."

"What are you——"

Fitzhugh Lee started the question amazedly, but Hal did not wait to answer.

His face white as chalk, the young aide darted toward the open window.

One frenzied look he shot out beyond.

Down below, beyond the edge of the porch, extended a stretch of lawn.

There was no living human being within a hundred yards.

Ascertaining this in a second or two, Hal drew back his arm.

Whish-sh-sh! Through the air shot Fitzhugh Lee's present, propelled by all the force that was in Hal's muscular arm.

Chug! It landed on the grass.

Then—

Bang!

There was a sharp report, a hole in the ground—no pieces of the box visible.

Pallid and shaking, Hal Maynard faced about.

Bet General Lee had not even changed color.

Shrugging his shoulders, he said, smilingly:

"That Cuban, Maynard, was a Spaniard!"

"Good heavens!" came from Hal's quivering lips. "When I realize how near that infernal machine came to blowing you to pieces, general——"

"Why, it simply shows how uncertain life is," finished Lee for him.

"All my fault, too," cried Hal, contritely.

"I don't see it, Maynard."

"Why, I was taken in, sir, by that sham Cuban."

"So was I, my lad. His story seemed very straightforward. I hadn't a doubt that he was speaking the truth. My mouth was watering for the kind of Havana tobacco he described."

"But I should have known better."

"Should have known more than your general, lad? Come, come, Maynard, you are too severe with yourself. You showed true nerve, and the same quick intelligence that I saw in you this morning when you rescued that child. But tell me what led you to so suddenly suspect the true nature of the box?"

"Just as you pried the lid, sir, I heard something that sounded like the faint whirring of machinery. Moving the lid must have started it in motion. Had you got the lid wholly up, general——"

Hal paused, but Fitzhugh Lee took up the thread for him.

"I should have been, by this time, Maynard, where some of the Spaniards no doubt wish me to be—with the sailors of the Maine."

"It must have been nitro-glycerine, general, since concussion set the charge off."

"Undoubtedly. Look out, my lad, at the crowd gathering on the lawn. They're trying to figure out what has happened. Don't let them see us, or some of the correspondents may make too good a guess."

A slight cough behind made them both turn.

"Why, here's our friend, Captain Proffitt," cried Lee.

"Waiting, general," responded the captain, saluting, "to see if there are any orders."

"Yes; tell no one what has happened."

But the captain's soldierly coolness recalled Hal to one part of his duty that had not yet been performed.

"General," cried the boy, picking up his sombrero hastily, "have I your permission to try to find and arrest that scoundrel?"

"Yes, by all means. But don't let any inkling get out."

"No general."

And Hal sped out of the room.

"General," supplemented Proffitt, "I ask permission to go, too."

"For what purpose?"

"Maynard may need aid."

"True; go by all means."

Stopping only to salute, Captain Proffitt hastened out.

He caught up with Hal by the eastern entrance of the hotel.

"Going with me?" whispered the young aide.

"Yes, sir! By ———— you can bet I am!"

As they hurried along up toward Lafayette street, Hal confided in low tones the best description he could give of the pretended Cuban.

There were few people near the nearly every one within hearing of the explosion being now on the other side the hotel grounds, where excited throngs surged about the hole in the earth that marked the incident.

"Any ———— idea where you going to look for the ———— rascal?" murmured Captain Proffitt.

"The fellow doubtless lingered to learn whether General Lee was injured by machine. By this time he must be aware that the general escaped. So I think, captain, that we'll have to look for the fiend about as far off as he will be able to get before we can overhaul him."

Proffitt nodded, adding:

"You can be pretty sure, lad, that the dag on his face was a ruse. He'll drop that off by this time."

"Of course. Suppose we take a look at the two railway depots?"

"I was about to suggest that," coincided Proffitt, "but there's one — — — — — vexing probability. While we're at one depot, this — — — — — candidate for hanging is likely to be at the other."

"But there are only two railway depots in Tampa, and one can go to each."

"That would be all right," grumbled Proffitt, "if I had any — — — — — how to know the dirty Spaniard when I see him!"

By this time they were outside the gate of the hotel grounds, and, as it happened that a trolley car was waiting there on the point of starting, Hal and his comrade reached the main part of Tampa without delay.

At the corner where the trolley line terminated it happened that an orderly stood holding the bridles of two saddle horses.

Each saddle bore white trimmings, while in one corner appeared the figure 3."

"Thirteenth Infantry, eh?" mused Proffitt, aloud. "Wait a second, May—" "d."

Darting up to the orderly, Proffitt demanded:

"To whom do these horses belong?"

"Captain Emerson and Adjutant Clive," replied the orderly.

"Emerson and Clive, eh? Do they happen to be out on business?—on important business, I mean?"

"I think not, sir."

Then tell them that Captain Proffitt borrowed their horses for half an hour on — — — — — important business. And, orderly, please convey Emerson and Clive — — — — — compliments."

Following which the profanest man in the

service sprang up into saddle, and, Hal following his example, they were off before the orderly had really time to speculate what he ought to do.

As if by common consent, both wheeled sharply north, riding at a swift gallop toward the Plant System depot.

Going at such headlong speed, both officers were at the depot in what seemed like a few seconds after starting.

But their man was not there.

"Maybe in some of the — — — — — saloons around here," grumbled the captain as Hal, dismounted, came up to him to report.

"Next train north goes in three minutes," replied Hal. "There isn't a train out on the F. C. & P. for twenty minutes."

"We'll watch here, then," grunted Proffitt.

And wait they did, though without result.

After the north-bound train had pulled out, both struck into an easy canter back down the street toward the F. C. & P.

As they neared the corner where Proffitt had borrowed the horses they perceived the orderly.

He was talking to two commissioned officers, and evidently, if his gestures were to be taken into account, was trying to explain something.

"Oh, Emerson!" shouted Proffitt.

Both of the officers standing with the orderly turned like a flash.

"— — — — — horses, these!" called Captain Proffitt.

Then, to the amazement of the infantry officers, both brutes cantered off down the street before there was time for their owners to say a word of remonstrance.

"— — — — — fine fellows, Emerson and Clive," asserted Captain Proffitt.

"Good natured enough to wait until we get back."

"They must be good-natured," laughed Hal, in response, though he did not turn to look at his companion.

His gaze was focused, instead, on both sides of the street.

So vigilant a search did he keep that, despite the speed at which they traveled, there was not a man on either sidewalk whom General Lee's aide did not scrutinize.

But the search of the street proved fruitless.

As they neared the railroad tracks, Hal's gaze roved over toward the depot.

"Great Scott!" he suddenly quivered.

"See him?" ejaculated Proffitt.

"On the platform—now he's turning to run."

Turning to run, indeed! At first sight of Fitzhugh Lee's young aide the only man standing on the depot platform darted through the open waiting-room door.

"I'll cover this side—you ride around!" directed the captain.

Hal's beast rounded the building on a dead run.

His suspect had already reached a field.

"Halt!" shouted Hal. "Halt, or I'll fire!"

As he shouted, Maynard reached at his hip for his revolver.

Not there!

In a flash it came over the young lieutenant that he had not worn his weapon that day. It rested secure in the drawer of the bureau in his room at the hotel.

"I'll grab him with my fists!" flashed the boy, resolutely.

But an instant showed that this proposition was not likely to be a safe one.

If he was unarmed, the Spaniard was not.

On the contrary, his enemy, finding

that Maynard was rapidly overtaking him, suddenly halted.

Both of his hands reached for rear pockets in the same instant.

"Balked!" growled Hal.

Two pistols glistened in the outstretched hands of the Spaniard.

"Shoot!" jeered the fellow, taking point blank aim at Lee's aide.

Instinctively, Maynard reined up, surveying the two muzzles that confronted him.

CHAPTER VII.

"WELL DONE, PREX!"

"I can't take a facer like this," grunted Hal, growling in the same breath at his stupidity in leaving his own weapon behind.

"You will turn your horse about, senor," ordered the Spaniard, coolly, "and ride back to safety as quick as Heaven will permit you."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," gritted Hal, resolutely.

"You hope to gain time until some one else comes to your aid," divined the scoundrel. "I shall give you fifteen seconds—short count—and then you die!"

He meant it. Hal understood that once.

"Yup!" chirruped Hal, at the same instant digging his heels into his steed's flanks.

That trained army beast vaulted forward, straight at the Spaniard.

But as Hal sent the beast forward made a flying side leap from saddle.

By good luck he landed on his feet.

Ready to fire, the Spaniard realized when too late, that only a riderless horse was before him.

Spring! Hal was on the fellow's back pinning both his arms to his side.

"Car-r-r-ramba!" snarled the foe. "I shall kill you yet!"

GIVE YOUR GIRL AN AMERICAN FLAG HAT PIN—SEE PAGE 32.

Hal struggled desperately, silently, but his superior strength soon told.

Holding the Spaniard powerless, Maynard reached down and forced him to drop one of the pistols.

Wrench! Hal dragged him by main force fifteen feet away from that spot.

The Spaniard was breathing hard. Foreseeing defeat unless he quickly turned the tide of things, he strove to turn his remaining pistol backward.

"You'll shoot yourself," warned Hal, striving hard for the mastery of the squirming wretch.

"Well, is it not as well to shoot myself as to be hanged?" jerked out the warthy one.

"Take your choice!" ground Hal, savagely.

But the Spaniard suddenly succeeded in pointing the muzzle under his arm, ready to fire.

Hal tried to wriggle out of range without letting go his hold on the dangerous one.

Crack! Through Hal's blouse the bullet tore.

Wrench! flop! The Spaniard was on his back, now, and Hal, kneeling upon the fellow, pressed one hand against the warthy throat while with the other hand strove to wrench away the pistol.

Jerk! He got it. The Spaniard was unarmed now.

"Remember, senor, that I am unarmed," panted the fellow.

But Hal was in a dangerous mood. Besides, he knew the Spanish nature well enough to look out for treachery at the most unlikely moment.

Thump! Poising the pistol by its barrel he brought the butt down savagely on the fellow's head.

A gasp was all that came from the warthy one. His eyelids fell. He was unconscious.

"Now to find how helpless he was?" uttered Maynard, rummaging over the fellow's person.

"Ah! I expected it!"

This came from Hal as he discovered the hilt of a long, keen stiletto just under the lapel of the Spaniard's vest.

"I'll keep this toy for a letter opener," smiled the boy.

Then, throwing the Spaniard over on his face, Hal began to knot a stout, twisted handkerchief about the scoundrel's wrists.

Click-clack! sounded hoofs, and Proffitt's voice sounded in astonishment:

"Maynard, what — — — — mischief are you about?"

"Got him," panted Hal, triumphantly, as he rose to his feet.

Proffitt's glance swept swiftly over the late field of combat.

He saw the two revolvers, the knife, and the dragging footprints.

He was too old an Indian fighter not to know exactly what those signs meant.

"Which is your revolver?" questioned the captain.

"Neither," flushed Hal. "I was fool enough to leave mine behind."

"Apparently you didn't need one," chuckled the captain, "and the — — — — Spaniard wouldn't have fared any better with six. Maynard — — — — me, you're the greatest wonder in a scrap I ever saw! — — — — me if I didn't think some of your exploits in Cuba were fiction. Now I understand what a — — — — fool I was."

The horse which Hal abandoned now came slowly back, submitted quietly to being captured by the captain.

"What shall I do with the prisoner, captain?" queried the young aide.

"Wait here, and I'll ride up the street a bit for a guard."

Which Proffitt did, and five minutes later, just as the Spaniard was beginning to revive, a corporal and four men took him in hand and expeditiously removed him to a safe place of restraint.

Thereupon, Hal and his companion rode back up the street.

They found the orderly waiting at the spot where they had first procured the horses, while Emerson and Clive had returned to their camp, leaving instructions for the orderly to bring the horses back to camp when possible.

"Were they mad about it?" asked Proffitt.

"No, sir," answered the orderly, saluting. "Captain Emerson said he knew you wouldn't do such a thing without good reason."

"Captain Emerson is a ——— fine fellow," cried Proffitt. "Wait a minute."

Disappearing into a nearby store, Proffitt soon came back with a box of cigars which he sent to the two officers with his compliments, more or less profanely worded.

"Come and have a lemon and soda," invited Proffitt.

After partaking of this refreshment they boarded a car, and were soon back at the hotel.

Here Captain Proffitt reported to General Lee, giving without envy all the praise to our hero.

"You have both done well, gentlemen," said the general, cordially. "To tell the truth, I hardly expected that you would succeed. Whenever it comes my way to remember your services to-day, be sure that I shall not forget you."

That was all, but Hal well knew the value of such praise from a general of Fitzhugh Lee's stamp.

Two minutes later the captain and the lieutenant were hard at work at their desks, with the connecting door closed.

General Lee had gone out to see General Shafter, informing our hero that he would not return until after lunch.

At lunch Hal and the captain sat together, while at a table but twice removed from theirs Generals Shafter and Lee partook of their meal.

"I will see you up stairs, Mr. May-

nard," explained Lee, as, in passing our hero's table at the end of the meal he stopped for an instant.

Therefore, while Captain Proffitt lingered behind to enjoy a cigar in the office, our hero followed at his commander's heels.

"How much have you done with those papers I intrusted to you?" questioned Lee.

"Twenty minutes of uninterrupted work will see them finished, general."

"Indeed? I thought it would take you at least all of to-day. You have hurried, Mr. Maynard. As a result, I think there will be little more work for you to-day."

"There is no immediate rush, then, sir?"

"Why, no, not if you have hurried at this rate."

"Then, general, I would like to ask for ten minutes for myself."

"Now?"

"Yes, sir. I have been so absorbed in my work that I have forgotten a poor dog that I am looking after. He is up in my room, without food or water."

"Attend to him by all means. By the way, is he vicious?"

"No, general; although he's aggressive enough when he needs to be. He's a dog captured from the enemy, so to speak—the one the dons from Mexico called McKinley."

"I remember that pup," laughed Fitzhugh Lee. "Well, the poor brute richly retaliated by nabbing the Spaniards in the end. Bring him down here at once. I shall be glad to see so famous a dog."

Whereupon Hal promptly went off, returning with his new four-footed friend Prex.

General Lee, being fond of dogs, quickly established a friendship with Prex, who wagged his tail joyously and showed his appreciation of the introduction.

"Feed him and give him water, lieutenant," suggested the general. "Then let him stay with you here this afternoon if you wish. He will be company to you if you are to have much idle time on your hands."

Saying which the commander returned to his own apartment.

"There, it's done," murmured Hal, as he reached the bottom of the last page of his work.

Folding the originals and the version in condensed cipher into two neat packets, Maynard rose with them in one hand and tapped on Fitzhugh Lee's door.

Answering the summons to come in, he stepped to the general's desk and laid down the papers.

Only a few moments later the corridor door opened into Hal's office.

Two black, snapping eyes peered in. Then their owner slid into the apartment on tip-toe.

"Very well done, Mr. Maynard," commented General Lee. "You have caught my idea excellently in your condensation. These originals I will have placed in the most secure safe immediately. Your copy I can carry about me; it will be of no use to any one outside the army into whose hands it fell."

In the next room the prowler was taking a comprehensive view of the room and its contents.

He could not cross to Hal's desk without danger of being seen from the next room.

But on a small table well within view stood another package of papers.

Upon these the prowler's eyes rested boldly.

"Carrajo! I can get them easily," he muttered. "And I shall be out of sight before——"

Hal and the general were still talking when the fellow's fingers closed over the papers.

He secured them, turned, and made toward the door.

But his flight was intercepted.

In his feverish survey of the room the prowler had failed to observe one article in the "contents."

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

Suddenly in his path now stood the fellow, every hair bristling with wrath.

"Easy, Prex!" admonished Hal, innocently from the next room.

There came a flash of steel, that ready sword of Spain!

But Prex had been brought up with Spaniards. He knew their tricks and

ways too well, presumably, to be caught in that fashion.

Leaping past the halting, irresolute stranger, Prex seized him from behind.

Just as Hal and General Lee sprang to the door to see what the commotion was about, a sight met their eyes that amazed them.

Prex, giving an ugly bite at the fellow's leg, next seized the fellow's coat-tails in his mouth, jerking the dismayed one back at his full length upon the floor.

With a yelp and a flying bound, Prex set his teeth in the wrist that held the knife.

"Car-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-rajo!" howled the rascally thief in his anguish.

Now Prex, as if feeling safe from the knife, stood with his gleaming fangs over the Spaniard's throat just as Hal sprang to his rescue, exclaiming:

"Well done, old fellow!"

Third Part.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISPATCHES FOR GENERAL LEE.

"Well done, indeed!" approved General Lee.

Hal, after picking up the knife, persuaded the dog to let go.

Then, seizing the terrified Spaniard by the collar and yanking him to his feet, Maynard saluted with his disengaged hand.

"General, your orders?"

"Captain," called the commander, and the captain appeared at the opposite door.

"Go after a guard, and see that this fellow is placed in safe keeping."

Then, as he turned toward his own room, Lee turned to say:

"The skies of Tampa seem to be raining Spaniards to-day!"

Nor was it long before one more of Spain's secret service men found himself in a Yankee limbo from which escape was out of the question.

Hal, returning to his desk when the excitement was over, found himself without any work to do.

GET A COLLECTION OF WAR BADGES AND BUTTONS.

For three-quarters of an hour he idled away his time.

There was an absence of cranks during the afternoon.

Two correspondents came in, to see if they could gain there any light upon the explosion on the lawn.

Hal's professed ignorance, however, well acted out, soon sent them away without the news they sought.

"Oh, Mr. Maynard!" hailed General Lee from the doorway.

Hal passed into the next room, taking the proffered seat.

"Maynard," went on the general, "I am going to tell you something confidential, and for a reason. The news is this: Much as I would like to go back to Cuba at the head of troops, I have reason to believe that the Washington government has other plans for me.

"The probability is that my division is to be sent to Porto Rico, since it now seems plain that the latter island is to be occupied as soon, if not sooner, than Cuba.

"In that case I shall be sent to Jacksonville to mobilize my division at that point. This morning I received dispatches to that effect. This afternoon I am likely to receive more dispatches on the subject.

"Yet I am compelled to start out to Palmetto Beach at once, in order to inspect a regiment which, I believe, will be transferred to my command. I shall start within five minutes.

"Now, as to my reason for telling you all this: If such dispatches come for me, you, who will open all telegrams addressed to me in my absence, will place those particular telegrams in a dispatch bag and send them to me at once. You understand?"

"I will send them, general, without an instant's delay."

"Good, and now as to the messenger. You know Lieutenant Kimberly, of my staff?"

"I have been introduced to him, general."

"He is to be my messenger. His office is three doors below yours. As soon as the dispatches come, read them, then hand them over to Mr. Kimberly. He

will at once mount and ride with them to find me at Palmetto Beach."

"I understand your orders, general."

"Very well; you may return to your desk, Mr. Maynard. Oh, one word more. As soon as you have attended to the dispatches, if any come for me, you may then consider yourself at liberty for the rest of the afternoon. Lock your desk and the room door, and report to me this evening when I return."

"Thank you, general."

Five minutes later General Lee, presenting a very striking figure in his major general's uniform, passed through the room on his way out.

Having nothing else to do, Maynard rang the bell and sent a boy to procure for him the latest New York papers.

Reading these, attending to a few unimportant callers, and listening to occasional profane outbursts from Captain Proffitt in the next room, furnished all the diversion there was for the next hour.

Then a messenger boy came in with some telegrams.

These, however, concerned only a few unimportant communications concerning quartermaster's and commissary arrangements.

Fifteen minutes later more telegram came.

"These are the real thing," mused Hal, eagerly.

The different telegrams proved to be but parts of the same message.

As rapidly as they came, our hero arranged the pages in the proper order.

Within twenty minutes of the arrival of the first page there came the final one bearing the signature, "Alger, S. War."

"All complete," reflected Hal, running through the pages once more to see each was in its proper place. "I wish I was I who was to ride over to Palmetto Beach. A good canter would take me out of this drowsy fit. As a next best thing, though, I'll go over to the Casino's swimming pool."

After lunch Hal had secured his revolver. This he now belted at his waist, picked up his sombrero, and left the room, after locking up as directed.

SHOW YOUR COLORS—SEE LAST PAGE.

"Come in," called Kimberly, as Hal knocked upon the door.

"The dispatches for General Lee, announced our hero, in a low voice.

"Expecting 'em," was the crisp reply. "All ready, my dear boy."

And "ready" Mr. Kimberly was, for he had on even his riding boots and sombrero, while from one shoulder hung his dispatch bag.

Into this he dropped the papers, locking the bag securely and dropping the key into an inner pocket.

"General Lee shall have these papers as soon as I can ride out there," he announced, rising and striding toward the door.

He waited only long enough for Hal to step outside, when he locked the door.

"My horse is feeling good," remarked Kimberly, cheerfully. "He hasn't been used for three days, so I'm sure to make good time."

"Success to you," smiled Hal.

Our hero was about to go down stairs when he remembered Prex.

"I'll take the old fellow up to my own room," decided the boy.

This he did, next turned his attention getting out a change of underclothing done after the swim.

Something impelled him to go to the window.

As he stepped to the embrasure his eye fell upon a bunch of army horses picketed in the yard below.

"Hello!" exclaimed the young aide. "There's Kimberly, just getting into the stable. Something must have delayed him."

Something certainly had delayed the lieutenant, for he was now activity as if he were anxious to make up lost time.

Just as Kimberly was settling into saddle Hal's eye moved to a spot some ten feet from the mounting officer.

He saw one man nudge another.

That action of itself would not have attracted the notice of our hero, had not one of the strangers then glanced in Kimberly's direction.

Kimberly galloped off.

How much Hal saw out of the corner

of his eye. He was still watching the two strangers.

Now the fellow who had been nudged left his companion, walking at fair speed down the line of picketed horses until he came to one that did not bear an army saddle.

"Looks like the fellow's own mount," mused Hal. "Can it be that he is going to follow Kimberly?"

Hal grew more uneasy as he watched the stranger gallop down the same road just previously covered by the dispatch bearer.

"Bosh!" grumbled Hal. "I'm getting Spaniard on the brain! Every stranger I see I'm beginning to suspect of being in the pay of Spain."

Thus he tried to laugh away his uneasiness, but the effort was not altogether an easy one.

"Kimberly is a man who can take care of himself," reflected Hal. "What could one Spaniard do against him, even if the fellow who just rode off had any sinister intentions. Bosh! I'm too nervous an old granny for the army!"

Still the feeling of apprehension would not down.

Prex, starting uneasily, rose and walked toward the window.

Arriving there, he turned and faced his master.

"What an old fool I am, am I not, Prex?" laughed Hal.

But Prex, throwing back snout and ears, opened his jaws to emit a low but long-drawn-out howl.

"Eh?" questioned Hal, looking intently at the dog.

Prex repeated his howl.

"So you're of the same opinion that I was, old fellow? Confound you, pup, you're not a real comforter. "You're making me uneasy."

As if he really understood the reproach, Prex jumped up, resting his paws on the window sill, and looking out.

"Wow!" he declared. "Bow-wow!"

"By Jove!" muttered Hal. "I'm really beginning to believe that you and my fears are right, doggie. Come on; we won't waste our warnings, anyway!"

Hal made his way quickly downstairs. Kimberly, by this time, had had two or

three minutes' start, and was doubtless far in the lead.

"I'll see if I can borrow a horse," reflected Hal, glancing at every officer whom he passed on his way down the broad veranda.

"Bow-wow!" came in a short, joyful bark from Prex.

Quitting his master, the dog leaped boldly over the rail to the ground, then scuttled off across the grounds.

"Now, what ails the old four-footed Spaniard-catcher?" wondered Hal.

Mounting to the rail, in order to see better over the shrubbery, Maynard followed the swift course of the dog.

"Eh? Hurrah!" Of course!" uttered the young aide, joyfully. "That dog always has the right eye open."

Away out on the grounds a soldier was exercising a horse—Hal's own steed.

No sooner did our hero discover this fact than he imitated Prex's course by leaping to the ground and running across the yard.

"Here!" hailed Hal, as soon as he got within calling distance.

Seeing him, the soldier wheeled and rode straight toward the officer.

"You had my beast out at just the right time," nodded Maynard. "I was just feeling the need of a spurt. Thanks."

And no sooner had the soldier dismounted than Hal, seizing pommel and mane, sprang into saddle.

He was off at a stiff canter.

But was he likely to pick upon the same road that Kimberly had taken?

CHAPTER IX.

A FOUL BLOW.

In all the service there was not a happier or more care-free officer than Lieutenant John Kimberly, aide-de-camp to General Fitzhugh Lee.

He was a young officer with an excellent record, a young man who invariably did his duty and left worrying to others who had more liking for it.

As he galloped through Tampa, with the dispatch bag securely slung over his shoulders, Kimberly's only thought was that he was enjoying his ride.

"Just the time of day for man and beasts," he reflected. "We both feel better for this spin, eh, old Leander?"

Down past the last of the regular army camps he galloped, occasionally acknowledging the salute of a passing soldier, or nodding to some brother officer on his list of acquaintances.

Then he struck into more lonely country. Here the houses were not frequent, and most of the passers-by were on the trolley cars that occasionally whizzed by him in one direction or the other.

"Confound these trolley lines, Leander," grumbled the young officer. "They were never built to please men who are really fond of the saddle. We'll turn into a quieter road."

This they found at the next corner.

By turning off thus from the beaten road, Kimberly almost escaped the vigilance of a man riding at some distance behind him.

Far better would it have been for that happy officer had he made better speed and turned that corner a full minute earlier!

"Diablo! I had all but missed him," chuckled the stranger who was following on horseback.

He looked ahead, and saw a road that well suited the purpose he had in mind.

Ahead the road appeared deserted for a half a mile.

"I'll soon have the gringo," muttered the pursuer, "if Heaven is kind to Spain to-day!"

He dug his heels into the flanks of the horse he bestrode, pressing forward at a gait that caused him to gradually gain upon Kimberly.

"I shall be up with him in a quarter a mile," muttered the pursuer.

It looked like it, indeed, until of a sudden the lieutenant's horse began to forge ahead.

"Diablo!" ground the stranger between his teeth. "What does this mean? Has the gringo officer seen me? Can he suspect that my errand is not exactly friendly to him?"

Yet this seemed highly improbable, the simple reason that Lieutenant Kimberly, as he rode onward, had not turned to look back.

"If it is to be a race," growled the evil-minded one, "I am poorly equipped, since my brute would lose one mile in seven to that long-legged beast ahead!"

Sweat poured out upon the brow of Spain's agent. He had worked hard, was prepared to sell his soul, if need be, to win, and here he was in great danger of losing the race!

"Go, you snail, go!" gritted the pursuer, trying with his heels and hands to urge his beast onward.

He met with some success, and that, too, just at a moment when it told best, for Kimberly's horse, having run off some of its exuberance, had now slackened its galloping pace a trifle.

"If we but meet, I am ready," smiled the evil-minded one, as he thrust one hand under his vest.

The hilt of a knife met his hand. It was fastened securely in place.

"Go, go, go!" panted the Spaniard, as he saw with exultation that he was rapidly gaining.

Kimberly's horse slackened still more.

"We win!" panted the rear-most one. It seemed indeed likely, unless the lieutenant's horse should take it into his head to try another spurt.

The Spaniard narrowly scanned the man he was chasing.

In plain sight hung the dispatch bag.

"That bag, and a minute's start," smiled the second man in the race, "and I shall care not what else happens!"

But one thing that his eyes saw filled him with apprehension.

Curse the gringo! Why does he wear a revolver in such a peaceful town as this? And these gringos are such infernal straight shots. Ugh! If he once strikes, and faces me with that in his hand, I am not likely to reap the price of a day's work. Why does Heaven ever permit the gringo to shoot so straight?"

Unconsciously of danger, Kimberly rode on, the turn that his thoughts taken contenting him with the slow pace of his horse.

He was galloping still, but with nothing like the speed that the stranger had introduced into his own stead.

Some one coming after me? Can it be

any one with more dispatches?" wondered Kimberly, as he turned in saddle.

He saw the stranger, and saw him making signals at that.

"He wants me to halt," mused Kimberly, slowly drawing his bridle-reins in. "Yet he can't be a dispatch bearer, for he's a civilian. Possibly, though, he brings some word from Maynard."

Unsuspecting Kimberly!

While not coming to an abrupt halt, he reined in sufficiently to make it an easy matter for the hard rider behind to overtake him.

"You wanted to speak with me?" he hailed.

"That is it. Wait until I can get alongside."

Still unsuspecting, Kimberly put more restraining power into his grip on the bridle.

"Well?" he demanded, wonderingly.

"Your — horse ——" gasped the stranger, as if short of breath.

"My horse?"

"Yes."

"What about him?"

"Something—wrong with——"

But the stranger paused as if trying to recover his spent breath.

"Cinch-strap belt loose?" demanded Kimberly, looking down, and shifting in his seat a little, as if to test the proposition.

The stranger shook his head.

"Wait a second, sir, and I'll be able to tell you."

Kimberly saw only an anxious man who had seemingly ridden hard to do him a friendly service.

He waited, therefore, with all patience, while the evil-minded one drew in huge whiffs of breath.

"Your horse appears to have the gasps as badly as you have," smiled the waiting Kimberly. "I thank you for taking so much trouble."

The lieutenant might have sprung to the ground and quickly have looked his beast over, but he was far too polite to think of that. Since this stranger had gone to so much trouble to give him the information, the lieutenant would wait until he could get it from that source.

While pretending to get his breath

back, the stranger was really making much better use of his snapping eyes than of his lungs.

He noted every detail about Kimberly, eyed the dispatch bag hungrily, saw the lieutenant's magnificent physical build, and noted just how handily placed the officer's big cavalry revolver was.

"There is but one way to get the better of him," murmured the agent of Spain, inwardly.

Kimberly waited with good-natured patience.

True, he was in a hurry, but a minute's delay could easily be made up on such a horse as he rode.

That was, unless something serious was really the matter with the brute.

"It would be awkward to have the beast go lame at this point," murmured the officer.

"Now I can speak," said the stranger, more easily. "I noticed some distance back that your animal showed the first symptoms of going lame."

"Why, it's odd that I didn't detect the fact in his gait," responded Kimberly.

"It was only the first sign of lameness," replied the other. "It is the animal's nigh hind foot that struck me as acting peculiarly. And I am enough of a horseman to tell you what is the matter."

Kimberly had now dismounted, and stood regarding the way in which the brute stood upon its nigh hind foot.

"Looks to me like a sound foot," spoke the officer.

"Not quite," responded the stranger, also dismounting. "My eye cannot deceive me. The brute has cut the foot on a sharp wire, or a splinter of glass. It will pay you to look into the matter."

"Leander, sir," commanded Kimberly, tapping the horse's leg, "put up your foot and let's have a look at it."

Up came the foot into his hand.

The stranger, standing at a little distance off, watched his chance with burning eyes.

"Don't see a thing," negatived the lieutenant, still looking. "Shoe's worn a little thin, perhaps, but nothing that would lame any horse. As for a cut, there's not even a pin-scratch."

"Ah! Now you are in error, sir," cried

the stranger, moving nearer to his intended victim with the stealthy, gliding movement of a snake.

"You've got blamed sharp eyes," grumbled the officer, starting to take another look.

"Sharp enough, sir, to take in the cut. As I suspected, sir, it is a very thin one, but I have no doubt it is deep. Hold the foot still, sir, and I will point it out to you."

One hand the evil-minded one held straight out to point to the alleged cut for which the lieutenant was looking his hardest.

Slowly, yet infallibly, the other hand traveled toward the lapel of his vest.

But Kimberly did not see the second movement.

A thorough lover of his horse, he thought only of the alleged hurt.

The eyes of the evil-minded one were now fully upon his.

Of a sudden it flashed upon the lieutenant that all was not well.

But the consciousness came too late!

There was a gleam of steel before his eyes.

Considerably lower down the point stuck in—driven home with a force that had hate behind it.

A groan!—one of Uncle Sam's office was lying in the dust, with a foul driven dagger in his breast.

Strange creatures horses are!

With its head turned, Kimberly's brute saw the deed.

As if determined to give no aid to the enemy, that animal made a sudden leap forward, then veered to the left, loped into the woods.

"I would have liked that brute," sighed the Spaniard, looking after the vamoosing horse. "But it matter's not the dispatch bag is mine!"

Raising the officer's head and shoulders, he roughly tugged at the shoulder strap.

He had spoken the truth—the dispatch bag was his!

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

"Father in Heaven! Missed by a second! Oh, that was fiend's work!"

From the only human spectator of the horrible scene came this shocked cry.

Hal Maynard had just galloped into view. He was too late to save his comrade.

It was not his fault. He had ridden hard—so hard that he had all but winded his steed, which was now panting at a rate that showed how little longer he could keep in the race.

And Hal had all but lost the trail, too, for he had kept along the main thoroughfare when Prex, who was running beside his horse, uttered a sudden short yelp, and, with his nose close to the ground, started up the narrower road.

"Hanged if I don't follow you, Prex!" muttered the young aide.

He was already past the entrance to the road, but, wheeling, Hal cut across a bit of forest instead of waiting to go back.

So it happened that he and Prex were now on the road, too late for the rescue, but possibly in time for vengeance.

"And the dispatches must be saved, even if it were to cost me the revenge," thrilled the young staff officer.

For a few minutes it looked as if the evil-minded one were to be hampered by troubles of his own.

For even his own horse now seemed to have taken a sudden aversion to the murderer.

As its late rider grabbed for the bridle, the brute yanked its head away.

"Steady, you brute," snarled the imperiled one as he sprang forward to make sure capture.

He would have made it, had not the animal reared squarely up, forcing the Spaniard to dodge out from under its descending forefeet.

"Now may all the fiends of torment torment you!" roared the enraged stranger.

Was it possible that the brute reciprocated the sentiment?

For, though his late rider pressed him closely, the brute wheeled and started to trot away.

And pounding down the road came

Lieutenant Hal Maynard, his eyes ablaze with righteous indignation.

By a superhuman effort the Spaniard sent himself flying through the air. He grabbed desperately at his horse's mane, caught it, and held on.

"You've failed, you miserable brute!" snapped the Spaniard.

Yanking himself into the saddle, he gathered in the bridle reins, cast one terrified look down the road at approaching Hal Maynard, and gave a gasp of dismay.

"The gringo is whipping his pistol out," he faltered. "May Heaven cause him to miss his aim!"

Hal's pistol whipped out into view, just as the Spaniard, turning his back, dug his heels desperately into his horse's sides.

Hal cast one commiserating glance at poor Kimberly, lying so still and unconscious in the road, but in a twinkling his gaze returned to the fleeing Spaniard.

The latter had not dropped the dispatch bag. He held it now, in one hand, flying in the breeze.

"I'll have that, anyway," muttered Hal, bringing up the muzzle of his pistol.

It would have been easy to shoot the Spaniard, and nab both with the same shot.

But Hal felt a swift conviction that the Spaniard must be saved for the present that he might pay, more infamously on the gallows, the penalty of his fearful work.

Crack! Never had our hero sighted that tried and true revolver with better result!

Pinging close to the fugitive, the bullet cut in two one of the straps of the dispatch bag.

"Another just like that!" thrilled the boy.

Crack! Lieutenant Hal's second shot was as superb as his first had been.

Fitzhugh Lee's dispatches were safe from the enemy!

The bag lay in the dirt, now—and inside of it were the coveted dispatches for which a crime had been committed.

"You might as well surrender!" thundered Hal, raising his revolver once more

as he rode close to the stranger. "I can drop you at any second I choose."

Back came the defiance:

"Do it!"

"He chooses lead over hemp!" ground the boy between his closed teeth. "Well, then, I won't leave it to his choice!"

Riding alongside, he reached over and seized the bridle of the other's horse, at the same time thrusting his weapon's muzzle close to the Spaniard's face.

In a jiffy, the other tumbled out of saddle, rolled in the dirt, got upon his feet, and went sprinting for the forest as fast as his feet would carry him.

For an instant, Hal thought of pursuing.

Then the remembrance of the dispatch bag flashed into his mind.

"No, no! that first!" he resolved.

Wheeling about, he sent his animal back at a gallop, bending low in saddle as he neared the bag.

Dive! One of his feet quitting its stirrup the young aide bent over head first.

His outstretched hand caught the bag, lifted it up.

He was in saddle again, and the coveted treasure was his!

He had ridden past Kimberly before he was able to slow up.

"Poor fellow," murmured Hal, wheeling. "A second or so won't make much difference to him. I'll get the fellow, first, who fixed him!"

Where was Prex?

That faithful brute had disappeared. Hal, though he noted the fact as he wheeled, did not pay much attention to it.

He rode back to where he had seen the stranger take to the woods.

Hal rode into the forest for a few yards, until the growth of underbrush made it difficult for him to proceed in saddle.

He was about to dismount when Prex ran out of some bushes just ahead of him. The dog yelped at a rate that made it plain he was trying to tell something.

And Hal opened his eyes very wide at the sight presented by the canine's jaws.

Blood dripped from them. His snout was smeared with the red fluid.

"Poor old chap!" cried Hal, throwing himself out of saddle. "You tackled him? I forgot that the brute had a knife. He has used it on you like a fiend, old chap. Now, show me the rascal's course."

Wheeling, Prex cavorted through the bushes.

They had not gone thirty feet when Prex gave another short bark that halted his master.

There upon the ground lay the stranger. He did not get up, did not even stir.

He never would again, of his own motion.

He was dead. Everywhere about his throat were the savage marks of the dog's teeth.

All about the ground was soaked with blood.

Hal now understood Prex's blood snout.

The dog, getting the Spaniard down had literally chewed his life out!

Beside the corpse were many prints, the dog's feet, giving some indication of the fierce struggle that had taken place.

"Prex, you old savage—you Spaniard killer!" gasped Lieutenant Manyard.

"Wow!" ejaculated the dog, exuberantly.

Hal turned away with a momentary shudder.

Then he looked down at the dog, now whining uneasily, as if he feared he might have done something wrong.

"There, there, old chap," muttered Hal, stroking the dog's head, "I do blame you. After all, you only gave Spaniard just what he gave one of our good fellows."

Prex threw back his head, smeared the boy's hand with some of the blood on his snout.

With a gesture of repulsion Manyard drew out his handkerchief, wiped away the blood, then threw his handkerchief away.

"This wretch is done for," he muttered, turning away. "I mustn't forget poor Kimberly."

It was a short walk back to his horse, which had waited patiently for its young rider.

Followed now by Prex, our hero cantered back down the road, dismounting by Kimberly's side.

As he did so, the latter opened his eyes.

"Glad to see you conscious again, old fellow," thrilled Maynard.

"I was when you first went by," came the faint answer.

"Why didn't you call to me?"

"I was afraid you would stop—didn't want you to until everything was all right."

"You stanch old soldier!" gulped Hal. "But now——"

"Get those dispatches to Lee as fast as you can, Maynard."

"And leave you here, unattended?"

"Yes."

"I'm afraid I don't know how to do that, old chap."

"You must. I direct it, as your ranking officer."

"Oh, if you put it that way. But I'll keep my eyes wide open on the way. The first chance I get I'll send back help."

"Do! It will be all right, Maynard. I feel that I've got a constitution good enough to pull me through this."

Hal pulled his comrade gently to the side of the road, resting him on a patch of grass, and making a pillow for the brave fellow with his blouse.

Then, in shirt sleeves, Hal mounted, turned to Prex, and called:

"Watch the lieutenant, old fellow. Do your duty!"

With a satisfied whine Prex crouched down in the sand, while Hal galloped off on the road.

Less than a mile off he passed the camp of the regiment.

In a twinkling two surgeons were riding off down the road.

It was not more than twenty minutes after that that our hero stood in the presence of Fitzhugh Lee, to whom he turned over the dispatch bag.

When Hal Maynard turned to ride back to Tampa, his face was flushing from well-earned praise.

Lieutenant Kimberly, who also came in for great praise, remained on sick report for three weeks.

Yet better even than Fitzhugh Lee's commendation was that general's young aide's consciousness of a day's duty well performed.

Into one day of staff duty Hal Maynard had crowded more good, effective work than some men could have done in a month.

[THE END.]

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